

Testimony – Raised Bill #387

Hello, Co-Chairs Sen. Winfield, Rep. Stafstrom, and committee members

My name is Erika Nowakowski. I live in Farmington Connecticut and am the Associate Director of the Tow Youth Justice Institute at the University of New Haven. I am here today in support of Raised Bill 387, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE.

I have worked with the JJPOC committee for five years and have been and continue to be impressed by the commitment of its members in creating reform of our juvenile justice system that has repeatedly improved public safety by implementing policies that hold youth accountable, striving for policies that keep communities safe, while at the same time understanding brain development and how trauma effects youth behavior. The research that supports these changes has told us that tough on crime bills don't work and only create higher recidivism and offenses.

Raised Bill #387 includes legislation to fully implement a community-based diversion system that already exists in the state and has been codified by this committee. This supports the bipartisan agreement that providing resources to communities is in the best interest of youth and their families. It also ensures that efforts be coordinated between juvenile justice, behavioral health, education, and prevention services to ensure the long-term and sustainable development of the child-serving system. Research has shown that under the age of 18 are more likely to act impulsively and engage in risk-seeking behavior. These behaviors are the product of normal child development. The more limited the individual is in their access to opportunities to advance their development, the more likely they will experience negative health outcomes or even re-offend. The best way to prevent future arrests is to stop the initial arrest from occurring in the first place. If that is not possible, diverting youth before the arrest can minimize recidivism. When a youth is placed into a pre-arrest diversion program, they are 2.5 times less likely to re-offend.

Raise Bill #387 also addresses the significant racial and ethnic disparities that exist in our state. It has been proven that black and brown youth running or playing with friends are more likely to be perceived as a threat than their white counterparts. Understanding the dynamics of what happens with pedestrian stops is

key to breaking down inappropriate entry into the juvenile justice system. One of the best ways to understand the impact in community dynamics is to engage youth and families who have lived experience in these situations. This bill will ensure that their voices are heard.

It should be noted that the bill has a significant missing approved JJPOC recommendation and that is ensuring supports and resources are provided for the implementation of the 2015 ban of out of school suspension and expulsion of children in preschool through grade two. Our CT children have experienced for the past two years significant transitions in their educational environment. Our educational systems need to be appropriately resourced so that when a crisis arises in the school setting the appropriate responses are taken to address the need of the child. In many cases the appropriate response is not a call by the school to law enforcement. Rather the appropriate response is a call to the Emergency Mobile Crisis intervention teams and collaborating with community based behavioral health providers and educators to address the needs of the child, so they are more prepared to learn.

I urge you to vote in favor of Raise Bill #387 for a more appropriate, developmentally, and trauma-informed process of effecting policy that creates long-term public safety and welfare of our youth.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak and am happy to answer questions. Thank you.